Continuation-in Part Patent Application

TITLE

ELECTROMAGNETICALLY SHIELDED HEARING AIDS

This appln is a CIP of Ser. No. 08/557,999 Filed 11/13/95. Pat. 5640,457

Names of Applicants: Louis T. Gnecco and Paula S. Gnecco,
both citizens of the United States of America,
residing at: 10301 Tamarack Drive, Vienna Virginia 22182.
Mailing Address: Please mail all correspondence to:
Louis T. Gnecco and Paula S. Gnecco
112-F Elden St. Herndon, Virginia 22070
(703) 709-9543 fax: (703) 709-9565

Cross References to Related Applications: None
Reference to "Microfiche Appendix": None
Other References: US Patent # 5,708,720 (Meyer)
This invention was not made under any Federally sponsored research and development program.
Background of the Invention:

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to hearing aids, and specifically to Behind The Ear, In The Ear, In The Canal, or Completely In The Canal hearing aids which are being shielded to be resistant to electromagnetic interference produced by cellular telephones in the 800 MHz to 2,500 MHz frequency range.

DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART

The invention consists of the following hearing aids which can be worn behind the ear, in the ear, or in the ear canal, these devices are widely known in the hearing aid industry as follows: Behind The Ear (BTE), In The Ear or All In The Ear (ITE), In The Canal (ITC), and Completely In The Canal (CIC).

This invention intends to shield these types of hearing aids from electromagnetic interference caused by cellular telephones in the 800 - 2500 MHz frequency range by using an electrically conductive foil to shield the circuitry components. Furthermore, an electrically conductive gasket, paint or plastic could also be used to shield the circuitry components.

Also, a filtering circuit composed of inductors and capacitors is used to shield the circuitry components wherein ferrite beads or ferrite toroids are used as the inductors.

Also, a removable protective cap, made wholly or partially of an electrically conductive material, that covers all of, or part of, the Behind the Ear version of the invention.

The following devices are related to, but do not comprise any part of this invention: hearing aids worn elsewhere on the body other than in or behind the ear, known as "Body Aids", aids which intentionally use an electric field antenna or a plane wave antenna, hearing aids which couple sound waves through the bones of the head, known as "Bone Conduction" hearing aids, and also hearing aids which are built into eyeglass frames, and any devices which require surgery to install, such as Cochlear Implants.

DESCRIPTION OF PRIOR ART

Figure 5 **(Prior Art)** Illustrates the elements which comprise a hearing aid. A Behind The Ear hearing aid is used for the illustration, but the same components are found in other hearing aids wherein the only difference could be the shape or size.

Figure 5 **(Prior Art)** shows a hearing aid consists of an outer case **1,** usually made of plastic such as Lucite (Poly Methyl Methacrylate), Non-Toxic Lucite, Poly Ethyl Methacrylate, Poly Vinyl Chloride, Silicone, or Polyethylene.

The case **1** houses and protects the internal circuitry components. The hearing aid has a battery door **3** which can be opened to replace the battery, an opening for a microphone **5**, an opening for the speaker or receiver **6**, and an opening for the volume control knob **7**. The case **1** often has switches and controls, such as an optional telecoil pickup switch which couples the hearing aid electromagnetically to a telephone handset. The internal components **2** also consist of amplifiers and signal conditioning circuits as shown in the block diagram. These circuits contain non linear elements such as transistors. Some of the internal components are coupled by fine internal wires **10**.

Besides all these openings as disclosed above, In The Ear, In The Canal, or Completely In The Canal hearing aids have a vent hole (not shown) to prevent the buildup of air pressure and moisture in the ear canal. This vent hole goes completely through the hearing aid. To build an effective hearing aid, one requires several openings due to current technology.

Todays hearing aid users are adversely affected by radio signals that are produced by cellular telephones in the 800 to 2500 MHz frequency range. These signals are often pulse modulated at rates of 200 Hz to 300 Hz.

Conventional hearing aids can unintentionally act as radio receivers, with their internal wires **10** acting as unintentional antennas, and their nonlinear elements unintentionally acting as detection and demodulating circuits. This causes the hearing aid to produce annoying or intolerable sounds, such as a 200 Hz to 300 Hz hum.

Shapiro (US Patent 2,327,320) teaches a body-hearing aid with a shield against electromagnetic interference which undoubtedly is only effective for low frequency sources of electromagnetic interference such as motors, hair dryers, and possibly fluorescent lights. It should be noted that this shield would not be effective against the current ultra-high frequency signals being experienced by today's hearing aid users. Ferrite beads and transistors were not available at this time and therefore, current circuitry components can not be shielded by the methods disclosed by Shapiro.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention consists of the following hearing aids which can be worn behind the ear, in the ear, or in the ear canal, these devices are widely known in the hearing aid industry as follows: Behind The Ear (BTE), In The Ear or All In The Ear (ITE), In The Canal (ITC), and Completely In The Canal (CIC).

This invention intends to shield these types of hearing aids from electromagnetic interference caused by cellular telephones in the 800 - 2500 MHz frequency range by using an electrically conductive foil to shield the circuitry components. Furthermore, an electrically conductive gasket, paint or plastic could also be used to shield the circuitry components.

Also, a filtering circuit composed of inductors and capacitors is used to shield the circuitry components wherein ferrite beads or ferrite toroids are used as the inductors.

Also, a removable protective cap, made wholly or partially of an electrically conductive material, that covers all of, or part of, the Behind the Ear version of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 **(Prior Art)** shows a Behind The Ear hearing aid **1 and 2**, an In The Ear hearing aid **4**, In The Canal hearing aids **5 & 6** and a miniature ferrite bead **3** which can be used in this invention. The Completely In The Canal hearing aid is not shown.

Figure 2 shows how electromagnetic interference is transmitted by a cellular telephone, is received by an internal wire of the hearing aid which acts as an unintentional antenna, is detected and demodulated by a

nonlinear element of the hearing aid (for example, a transistor), and results in a loud, audible signal which is annoying or intolerable to the hearing aid wearer.

Figure 3 Shows how the electromagnetic interference can be reduced or eliminated by adding one or more inductors in series with the internal wire which acts as an unintentional antenna. Ferrite beads can also be used in place of the inductors shown.

Figure 4 shows how the electromagnetic interference can be reduced or eliminated by adding one or more capacitors in parallel with the internal wire which acts as an unintentional antenna.

Figure 5. **(Prior Art)** mechanically and schematically illustrates the elements which comprise a hearing aid. A Behind The Ear hearing aid is used for the illustration, but the same elements apply to In The Ear, In The Canal, and Completely In The Canal hearing aids, the only difference being one of size and shape.

Figure 6 **(Prior Art)** Illustrates various ways in which inductors and capacitors can be arranged to form low-pass filters. Ferrite beads can be used in place of the inductors shown.

Figure 7 describes the invention.

Figure 8 shows an electromagnetically shielded Behind The Ear hearing aid 81 with a removable protective cap 82 installed. Figure 9 shows the electromagnetically shielded hearing aid 93 with the protective cap 94 removed to allow access to the battery compartment 95.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The invention, shown in **figures 7, 8 and 9** consists of the following elements: an outer case **11,** which holds and protects the internal components **12** and is shielded by one or more of the following:

11a: Painting the case with a conductive coating, usually a paint which is filled with silver, nickel, or copper, such as the following products made by Chomerics, Inc. of Woburn Massachusetts: "Cho-Shield 596" or "Cho-Flex 601."

11b: Lining the case with an electrically conductive material such as conductive foil, usually copper or aluminum foil, such as "Cho-foil" produced by Chomerics, Inc.

11c. Making the case out of a conductive material, such as a plastic which has been impregnated with metal or carbon.

11d. Using conductive gaskets such as "CHO-seal 1215" made by Chomerics, Inc.

The outer case **11** houses the internal components **12** which must sometimes be shielded in addition to the case. The techniques used to shield the internal components **12** are those described in 11a,11b,11c,and 11d above.

The internal components **12** of the hearing aid must also be sometimes modified so that the 800 MHz - 2400 MHz radio signals produced by the cellular telephones cannot pass effectively from one component to another. This is done in such a way that the normal functions of the hearing aid are not adversely affected. Some or all of the following techniques are employed:

12a: The addition of one or more inductors **13** in series. Figure 2 depicts a pulse modulated radio signal such as those produced by some cellular telephones. This signal is unintentionally picked up by an internal wire, acting as an unintentional antenna. The signal is then demodulated and detected by one of the nonlinear elements of the hearing aid, such as the audio amplifier. As shown in figure 3, by adding one or more inductors in series with the unintentional antenna, the incoming radio signal is blocked

by the high impedance of the inductors. The inductors present a low impedance to the intended audio signals, which pass through intact.

12.b: The Addition of Ferrite beads **14**: Ferrite beads, such as model # 2673008501 made by Fair-Rite Inc. of Wallkill, New York and depicted as item #3 in figure 1, when slipped over an internal wire effectively add an inductor in series as described in 12a above. Other shapes of the Ferrite material, such as toroids, rods, and custom molded shapes may be used.

12c: The addition of one or more capacitors in parallel: As shown in figure 4, the addition of one or more capacitors in parallel with the unintentional antenna has the same de-coupling effect as the addition of inductors in series. In this case, the capacitors present a very low impedance to the radio signal, shorting it to ground. The capacitors present a high impedance to the audio signals, which pass through intact.

12d: Filtering: This consists of adding combinations of inductors (including ferrites) and capacitors as described in figure 6.

22: Protective Cap: As shown in figure 8, an electromagnetically shielded Behind-The-Ear hearing aid **81**, with a protective cap **82**, made wholly or partially of an electrically conductive material, covering all of or part of the hearing aid, and which, as shown in figure 9, can be removed to allow access to the battery compartment **95**.

Hearing aids range from simple audio amplifiers to complex devices employing digital signal processing techniques. Each design presents a slightly different problem and some or all of the above protection techniques will be used. Because of the many openings that a hearing aid must have, it is impossible to shield its outer case **11** completely. The high field strengths and Ultra-High Frequencies produced by cellular telephones will usually leak through the openings, requiring supplemental protection in the form of a combination of the above techniques.

The preferred embodiments are described in claims ~~11~~ 1 and ~~14~~ 4.

The resultant hearing aid will be unaffected by the radio signals produced by cellular telephones, allowing hearing impaired people to take advantage of cellular telephones and other personal communication devices while wearing their hearing aids.